

IN THE RUINS OF EMPIRE: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia. By Ronald H. Spector. Published by Random House. 358 pages. Stock #0375509151. \$23.76 MCA Members. \$27.95 Regular Price.

Readers of military history will readily recall Ronald H. Spector, a Vietnam Marine veteran and author of "Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan," the widely acclaimed account of our World War II struggle with the Empire of Japan. In his "In the Ruins of Empire," Spector expands on his classic volume by providing us with a comprehensive account of the regional conflicts that followed the war's cessation in the Pacific theater.

When Japan suddenly surrendered, there were an estimated four million Japanese troops still garrisoned throughout the Asia-Pacific rim. The victorious Allies faced unforeseen and often volatile problems in many of these Asian countries.

Spector details the war's aftermath and bloody struggles in China, Manchuria, Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia. In a flash, the Japanese Empire vanished and there ensued a scramble to fill the enormous void the Japanese vacated. As the Cold War heated up, it quickly collided with various countries' struggles for national independence and self-determination.

The day after Japan surrendered, American General George Wedemeyer wrote, "I view Asia as an enormous pot, seething and boiling." America's initial goals included liberating Allied prisoners of war throughout Asia by first disarming the Japanese, and then repatriating the Japanese soldiers to their homeland. The First and Sixth Marine divisions were quickly deployed to China, and U.S. Army troops moved into South Korea.

British, French and Dutch ambitions to recolonize their former territories clashed with various Asian nationalistic movements. A dangerous conflict for power and control lit up the Pacific rim with unexpected ferocity. Old rivalries, class and ethnic disputes, were further exacerbated by underlying religious turmoil. Additionally, various forms of civil conflict broke out in all these unstable areas.

Soviet armies swiftly moved into Manchuria and North Korea, primarily to strip these countries of their raw materials and manufacturing capacity, but also to strengthen their borders from the threat of future Oriental aggression.

In China and Manchuria, Chiang Kai-shek's national forces moved to counter Mao's Communist forces in a deadly struggle for control. And in the formerly French colony of Indochina, Ho Chi Minh called for the establishment of an independent republic of Vietnam. And, the

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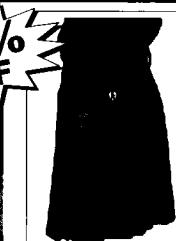
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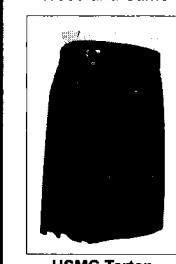
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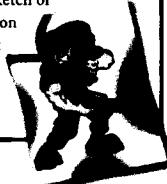
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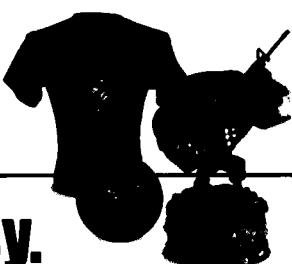
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Dutch were resolute in their attempt to re-establish themselves as masters of Java, Sumatra and all the surrounding islands then commonly known as The Netherlands East Indies.

Spector's new book, "In the Ruins of Empire," is soundly documented and very well written. His profound insight into 20th-century military and political history is flawless. There is much to be learned about the void in East Asia created by the Allies' defeat of Japan. These lessons, if acknowledged, might have value today in Iraq today.

The depth of his scholarship underlies all his collective writings. With more than 20 pages of notes, "In the Ruins of the Empire" will stand the test of time, and will pave the way for future historians to research the turbulent Cold War period.

Robert B. Loring

Editor's note: "Red Bob" Loring provides frequent reviews for Leatherneck readers. A Marine veteran, he is a founding member of the Sergeant Major Michael Curtin Detachment (Det. 1124), Marine Corps League and a leader in East Pasco County, Fla., community efforts, particularly Toys for Tots.



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